

THREE SEASONS OF EXCAVATIONS AT KHIRBAT ISKANDAR, 1997, 2000, 2004

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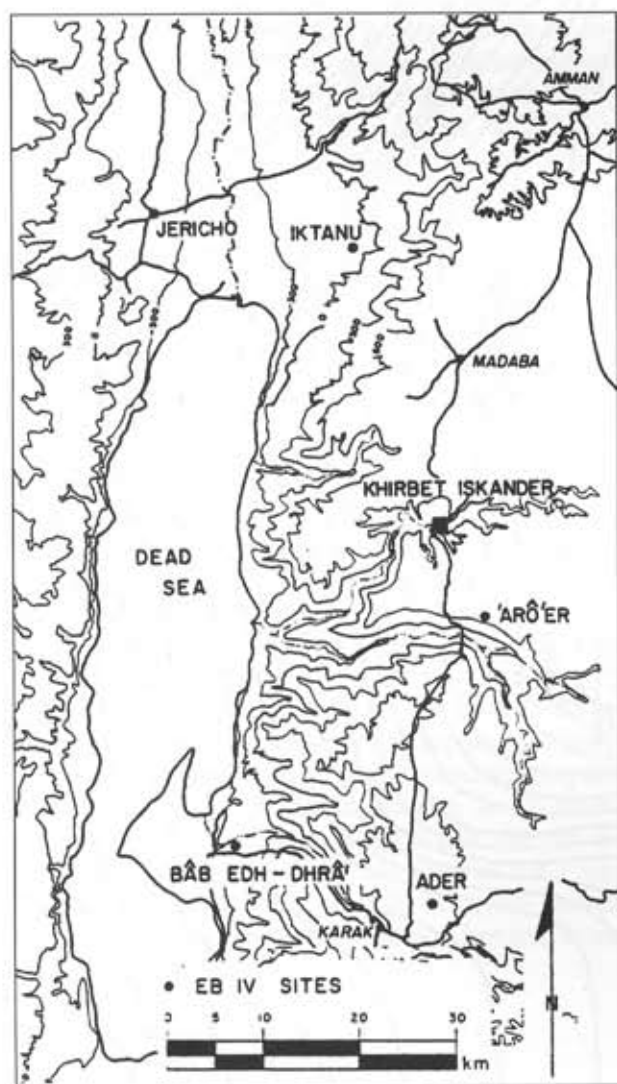
Introduction

The Archaeological Expedition to Khirbat Iskandar and its Environs completed its ninth season of work at the site in a five weeks season from May 15 to June 20, 2004 (Fig. 1). The history of the project includes: a) two pilot seasons, Phase 1 in 1981 and Phase 2 in 1994; b) six full seasons of

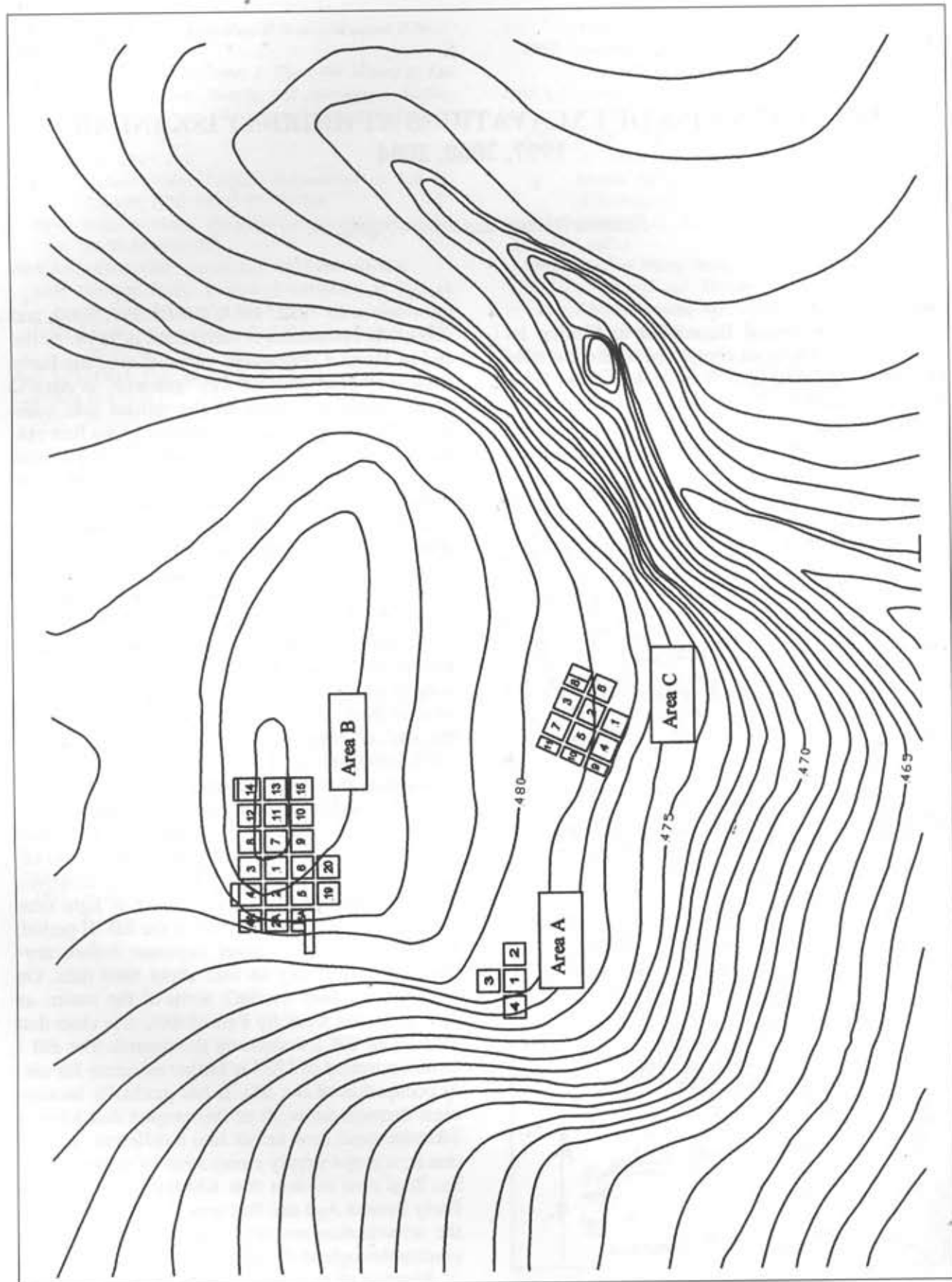
excavations in 1982, 1984, 1987, 1997, 2000, and 2004; and c) a season of restoration in 1998. At the end of Phase 1 operations, excavation of the Early Bronze IV (hereafter EB IV) "gateway" in Area C at the southeast corner of the mound was completed. These results are the subject of the first volume soon to be published on the Khirbat Iskandar Excavations. In Phase 2 operations, work continued in Area B, at the northwest corner of the mound, now a vast field of twenty 5 x 5m squares (Fig. 2). Over the years, the project has gradually uncovered one of the most important settlement sites from the EB IV period, including a defense system, clearly used by the EB IV population.

Beginning in the 1997 season, a major objective was to excavate earlier occupational levels on the interior of the fortifications in order to resolve issues of their phasing and dating that had arisen at the end of Phase 1 operations. Throughout the 1997, 2000, and 2004 seasons, the team achieved a substantial horizontal exposure of a pre-EB IV stratum of well-preserved structures within the fortifications. This pre-EB IV stratum has in the past been termed EB II-III, due to a lack of clear-cut ceramic diagnostics. In the 2004 season, however, unmistakable diagnostic types came to light confirming the date of the stratum to the EB III period. Earlier strata await further exposure before anything definitive may be said about their date. On the basis of work in 1987 north of the tower, as well as earlier work by Parr (1960), it is clear that there is an EB I stratum on the mound. The EB I tomb excavated in 1987 is further evidence for early occupation of the site. It has gradually become clear through the work of this project that Khirbat Iskandar must now be set into a different context; that is, it is not simply a major EB IV regional center. It is now evident that Khirbat Iskandar is an Early Bronze Age site that appears to be witness to the urbanization and reorganization processes occurring throughout the forth-third millennia BC.

Because of the clarification of the occupational history, phasing, and dating of the Khirbat Iskandar



1. Map showing the location of Khirbat Iskandar on the ancient "King's Highway" and other key EB IV sites.



2. Topographic plan of Khirbat Iskandar, showing Areas A-B-C, looking north.

stratigraphy in the latest season of excavations (2004), this essay is both a preliminary report on the past three field seasons at the site, as well as a reevaluation and updating of the stratigraphical history of the site, as reported in earlier publications. The resolution of the dating of the fortifications this past season has greatly aided our overall understanding and interpretation of the site's history.

The project was sponsored, once again, by a consortium of three schools: Gannon University, Erie, PA; Lubbock Christian University, Lubbock, TX; and McMurry University, Abilene, TX. The project is, and has been since its first season in 1981, affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research and, in particular, the American Center of Oriental Research in 'Ammān, and under permit granted by the Department of Antiquities, Jordan.

Research Design and Objectives

The overarching goal of the project from its inception has been to examine the nature and extent of sociopolitical complexity in the post-urban EB IV ("Intermediate EB-MB") period, ca. 2350-2000BC. This period, traditionally considered a pastoral/rural interlude between the two urban eras of the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages, has undergone considerable reevaluation over the years (see Richard 1987, 2003; Long 2003). Regardless of the various models proposed, the growing number of excavated and surveyed EB IV settlement sites, particularly in Jordan, affirms the thesis that sedentism, as well as pastoral nomadism, were both important economic strategies following the general demise of city-life at the end of EB III. The extent and well-preserved nature of the multiple EB IV settlements at Khirbat Iskandar demonstrates that even small towns continuing a semblance of urban life existed in the period. In light of the history of occupation on the mound (really *tall*) of Khirbat Iskandar, the project expanded and revised its research design to concentrate also on 1) documenting the so-far elusive stratigraphic transition between EB III and EB IV; and 2) investigating the processes of urbanization at the site. In all probability, Khirbat Iskandar will be a key site for illuminating the evolutionary trajectory of EB I village to EB II-III city to EB IV post-urban sedentary strategies in the southern Levant, from ca. 3500-2000BC.

The 1997 Season

Area B

The 1997 excavations in Area B were the first full-scale operations at the site following a hiatus

of 10 years (Richard and Long 1998), except for a brief pilot season (Richard and Long 1995). At the end of 1987, although work was completed in Area C, excavation had inevitably raised more questions elsewhere, in particular, in Area B (Richard 1990), where a newly discovered inner fortification line raised intriguing questions about the overall defensive system at Khirbat Iskandar (for previous reports see Richard 1981, 1982; Richard and Boraas 1987). Moreover, further exposure of the Phase B EB IV "storeroom" and recovery of yet more quantities of restorable vessels raised important issues about the extent of what now appeared to be a "public complex" (see Richard 2000). In 1997, the objectives were to: a) expose the entire architectural plan of the "public complex" (Area B East); and b) excavate earlier occupational levels south of and associated with the fortifications (Area B West). Since the 2000 and 2004 expeditions have updated and further clarified the stratigraphy of Area B, the following summary of the 1997 results intends only to highlight some of the major discoveries of that season.

Area B West: The decision was made to use Square B2 as the main area of investigation. It is in this square where the western perimeter wall (2053) abutted the square tower (2077) and where probes had glimpsed earlier phasing related to the foundational levels of the defenses and associated occupational phasing. Upon removal of EB IV Phase B remnant walls, excavation encountered a (0.30m) destruction level of mud brick debris and ashy soil layer. Below, there appeared a well-preserved stone structure W. 2095 (0.75m wide), whose earlier construction phase was evident in the courses below the threshold of the doorway. The wall ran from the south balk northward, continuing as W. 2062 abutting Tower 2077. Mud brick lay on top and filled the 0.55m wide doorway of Wall 2095 (Fig. 3). Well-constructed and good-sized threshold steps made it evident that to enter from the western (exterior) side, one had to step up into the structure. The south balk showed that mud brick had slumped off W. 2095 toward the west. It is probable superstructure material. This 1.50m high, well-built stone (and probable mud brick) wall provided our first glimpse of a well-preserved pre-EB IV non-defensive structure at the site.

Clearance of the mud brick destruction debris to the east of W. 2095 uncovered two solid surfaces, one (2118) fairly level with the threshold and the other (2121) some 0.25m below. EB II/III pottery was found on the surfaces. Lower surface 2121 was traced to the foundation level of Tower 2077 and to (bonded) Steps 2102. The significance of these dis-



3. The Area B, Phase C settlement looking from the east (Squares B7, B1, B2), within the fortifications on the north (photo: R. Miceli).

coveries is that they were the first clearly stratified occupational levels (termed preliminarily Phases C1-2) found associated with the founding of the fortifications. Furthermore, the destroyed upper level offered an explanation for the mud-brick layer encountered virtually everywhere in probes below the EB IV Phase B settlement. It became clear in the 1997 season that the fortifications were founded in the urban EB II-III period and only reused/rebuilt in the EB IV period.

Work in Square B2 also clarified western perimeter W. 2053 (Fig. 4). It had suffered the same destruction as W. 2095 for, similarly, mud-brick debris and ash had fallen against it. The fact that the base of W. 2053 was higher than the Tower foundation prompted us to tentatively conclude at the time that it was probably a secondary blocking wall, thrown up against the tower, perhaps following an earlier destruction. At the end of season, a probe west of the threshold steps gave us a glimpse of earlier phasing: a two-row curvilinear wall (2108) appeared to run from under W. 2095 toward the west balk; perpendicular to its base, the outlines of another wall (2113) were evident.

The discovery of EB II-III occupational remains, and their obvious implications for the dating of the defenses, prompted us to revisit the deep sec-

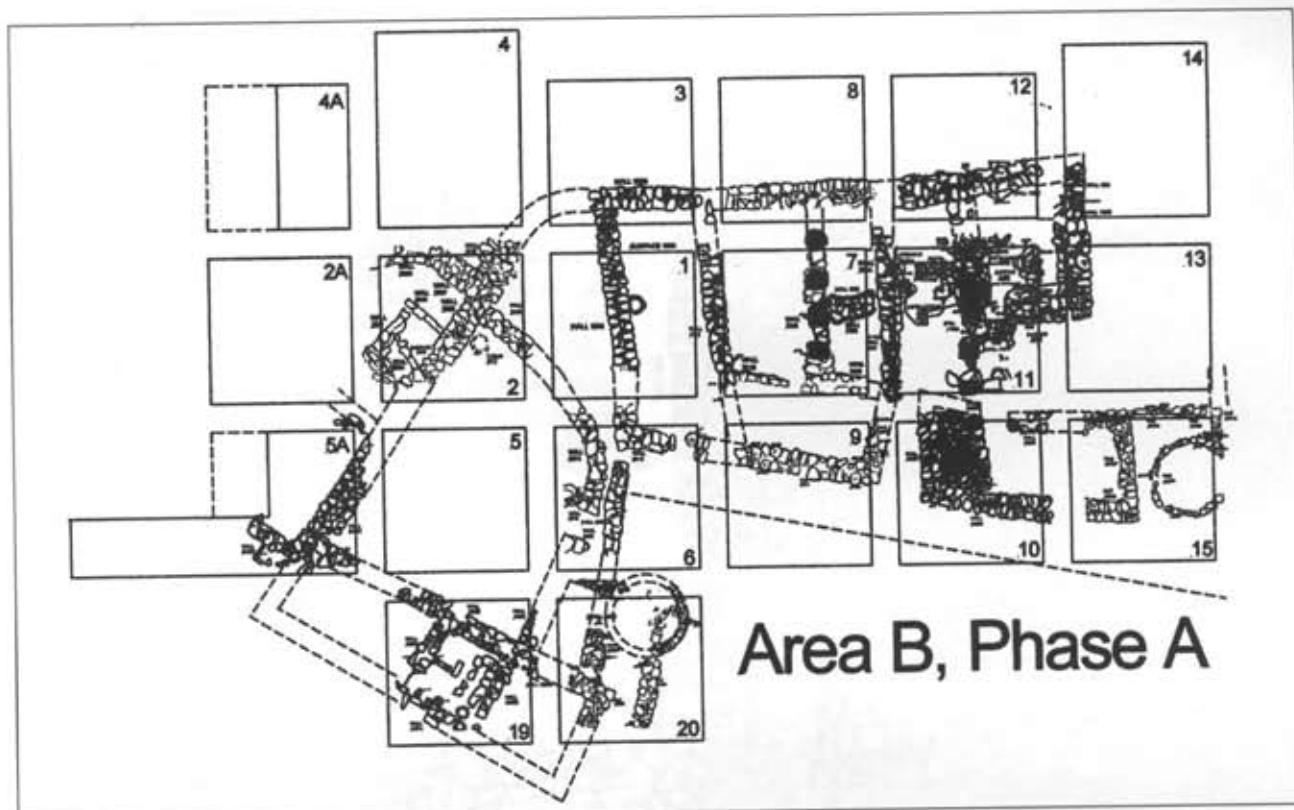


4. Area B, Square B2 western perimeter wall abutting the northwest corner tower, viewed from the east.

tion against the northern face of the fortifications in the Square B4 extension. In 1987, when first excavated, the foundation trench discerned in the B4 section — which included a piece of a black painted caliciform cup and a few undistinguished sherds — was dated to the EB IV, as everything else on site. When cut back in 1997 to reexamine the deposition layers, the B4 section again yielded sparse ceramics, but the undistinguished Early Bronze Age sherds could now be compared with the range of EB II/III ceramic ware found in Square B2. It was evident that the previous EB IV date assigned to the foundation trench would have to be reconsidered.

Finally, work in Square B5, though limited, provided important new data for our EB IV Phase B level. As elsewhere in that level, restorable vessels were found within the collapse lying on a plaster surface. Of great interest was the discovery of a metal object lying on the surface in the southwest corner of the square. The object was a miniature bronze spearhead of an early “folded over” socketed type. For details concerning this unique object, see Richard (in press).

Area B East: At the east end of the field, new squares B13 and B14 were opened, while work continued in B11 and B12 with the dismantling of the remaining Phase A EB IV structures. We hoped to ascertain the furthest extent of the Phase B “public complex” and, possibly, to expose even earlier levels. The recognition of sub phasing in Squares 11 and 12 helped to clarify the construction and use history of the Phase A pillared buildings (Fig. 5). As found in B7 to the west, the solid house walls of Phase A1 superseded Phase A2 pillared buildings, as shown clearly by blockages between pillar bases. Benches 11024 and 13023 were later additions in this phase, built up against the inner southeast



5. Area B, Phase A plan.

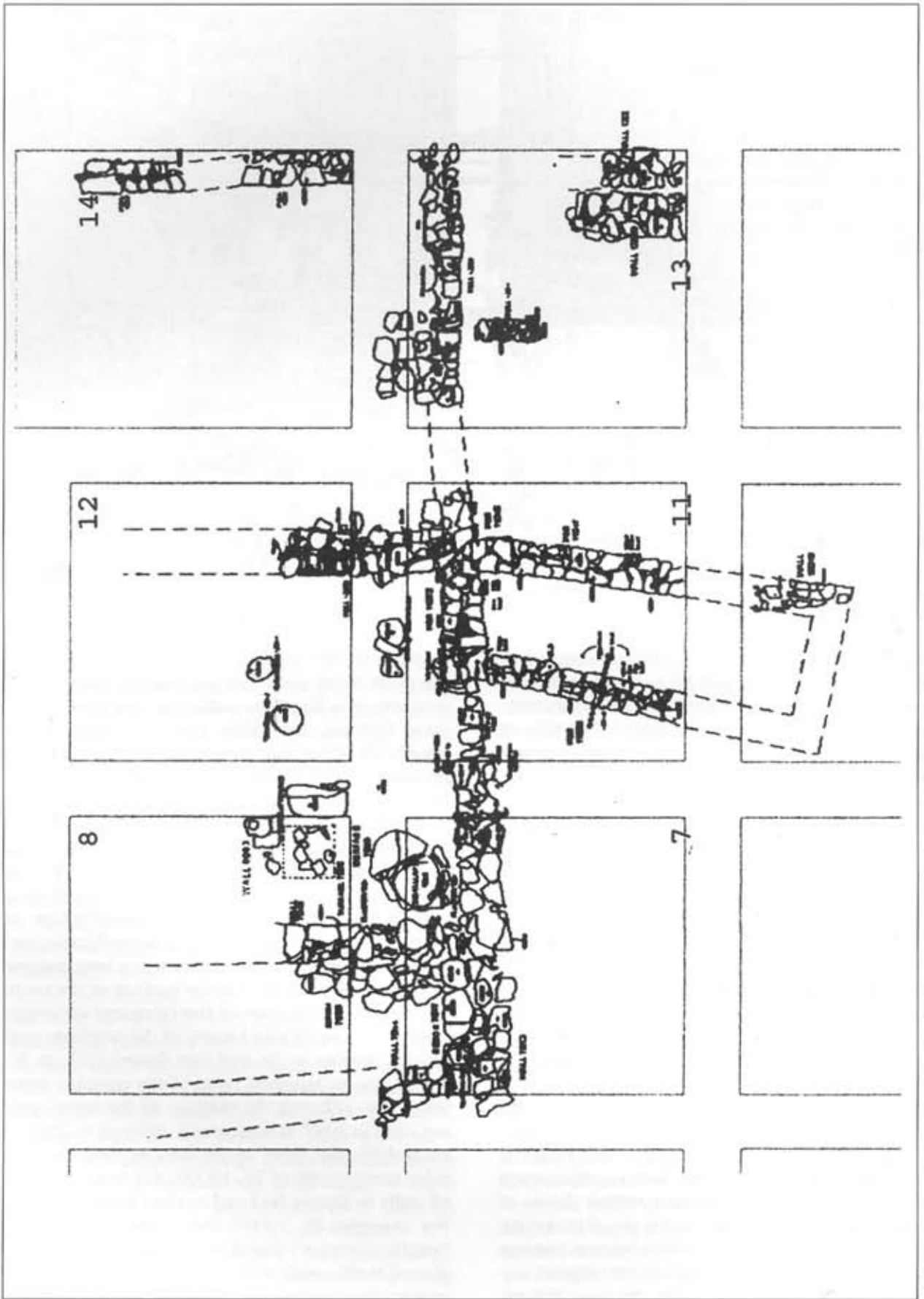
corner of the room. Plaster surfaces connected all these structures. The area in B13 and 14 to the east may have been an open area/courtyard at this time. Throughout all of Phase A, the typical repertoire of domestic equipment, e.g., querns, grinders, mortars, spindle whorls, cooking pots were recovered.

As for the Phase B “public complex,” this season’s work emphasized even more its completely different character from Phase A. Previously, work had uncovered a bench-lined room connected to a large, central room (Richard 1990). The features exposed during the 1994 season, pillar bases and steps, became much clearer with the eastern wall of the main room now delineated by north-south W. 12058 (Fig. 6). The latter ends at the south face of the foundations for Phase A wall 12003 and may have been cut during its construction; a similar phenomenon was noted at the west end. Also, no north wall to the building could be clearly defined, suggesting again that the northern fortification line served as that boundary.

Although one major level of use was found in the complex of rooms — the plaster surface upon which there lay the collapse/destruction debris of roofing materials and stone — it is possible that the mud brick surface layer into which various features were set, could have functioned as the original surface. It was difficult to separate the two. For ex-

ample, into the mud brick surface-layer were set the pillar bases and other large stone features. The remnants of a flagstone surface, in association with these features, may have originally covered the mud brick debris layer. Previously, excavation had revealed a stone-hewn bin to be cut into the mud-brick layer.

Further excavation to the east exposed a third room beyond the central room, while work to the south revealed a corridor-type of room, both of which affirming the nature of the structure as a complex of some sort. Further investigation of Steps 11038 showed that they led south onto surface 11073, to the east of which was a long, narrow corridor type of room. On the surface of the room lay large concentrations of flat-lying and restorable pottery. As we exposed more of the southern wall of the complex to the east into Square B13, as W. 13009, the easternmost room of the complex came into view, although the outlines of the room were not clear in 1997. It was equally difficult to observe an architectural plan of the area beyond the corridor room, south of W. 13009, due to the number of walls in Square B13 and to clear reuse evidence. For example, W. 13009, the southern wall of the “public complex” building clearly abuts a multiphased north-south wall (13030), whose depth and construction technique identify it with Phase C



6. Plan of the "public complex" in Area B (Phase B).

walls found in Area B West. This season we did not reach any associated surfaces and, thus, cannot yet interpret or date these earlier structures. If they are Phase C structures, the stratigraphy in Area B East contrasts with that in Area B West, where we encountered no difficulty in separating Phase B and C walls (Square B2).

Finally, in Square B14, we exposed more of the line of fortifications along the northern perimeter of the site; that is, an outer (northern) line and an inner (southern) line of fortifications with a line of rubble in-between. Somewhat unexpectedly, we also discerned the first outlines of what appeared to be a large stone structure (tower?) on the south side of the inner wall. The season ended before further investigation could ensue.

The 2000 Season

In 2000, the strategy was similar to that of 1997, i.e., further exposure of both Phases B and C in Area B. To that end, this season the team opened new squares B9, B10, B15, B19, B20, as well as extensions B2A and B5A (Fig. 2). Combined with work in previously opened squares, this significant horizontal exposure provided us with a more detailed view of the EB IV Phase A settlement, additional data concerning the extent of the EB IV Phase B settlement, and a significant expansion of the earlier, Phase C settlement. Again, since the 2004 expedition has updated and further clarified the stratigraphy of Area B, the following summary of the 2000 season intends only to highlight some of the major discoveries. For ease of reporting, it is preferable here to summarize the results by phase, in Area B West and Area B East.

Phase A

Area B West: New squares B19, B20, and the B5A extension revealed another large, well-built multi-roomed structure and considerably clarified the settlement plan of the Phase A EB IV occupants at the west end of the field. Square B19 proved to be the center room of a three-room structure that stretched 10m, cornering in B20 to the east and bonding with major north-south W. 5A002 in the west (Figs. 5 and 7). Typically for Phase A, the wall lines were visible immediately under a layer of tumble and topsoil. The B19 room had two blocked doorways — solid or blocked walls being typical of the upper (Phase A1) levels throughout the field — and a partition wall, both providing evidence for sub phasing in Phase A, as noted elsewhere. It is not known if the doorway in the south wall leads to additional rooms.

The features uncovered in the room all appeared



7. Area B, Phase A: Square B19 structure with "kitchen", from the east (photo: S. Rempel).

to relate to similar domestic activities that would suggest a food preparation area. We called it the kitchen. The features within the room were all connected with the same surface. They included the remains of what appeared to be a *tābūn*, a work platform, a storage area, and three sunken features, two of which

seemed clearly to be mortars. The *tābūn* (or possible bin) was quite shallow and included a very little ash. Contiguous to it, there was a large flat stone probably serving as a work platform or portion of a bench. The *tābūn* seemed clearly associated with a storage or bin area in the northwest of the room, as defined by elongated stones. There were also three sunken features in close proximity, two of which were within the southern doorway, the western of which may have served as the door pivot. The other two displayed much larger holes and presumably functioned as mortars.

The contrast between Square B19 and Square B20 to the east was striking. There was an unusual amount of destruction debris in B20, including multiple phases of roof collapse and wall tumble, as well as intrusions. No living surfaces could be discerned. Intrusions included a bin and several burials. In the west two modern burials, dug into the

doorway of the wall at the northwest corner complicated the separation of Phase A and B walls, although by end of season, the clear recovery of Phase B walls in contiguous square B6 to the north provided the needed linkages (below). Phase A wall (2008) running north from the south balk ended abruptly in mid square, apparently cut by circular installation 20013. Not excavated, this installation remains an enigma as yet; however, an apparent parallel installation was excavated in Square B15, discussed below. Over all, the Phase A settlement plan at the west end is gradually coming into focus. As in the north and east, there appear to be a series of multi-roomed buildings interconnected through common walls.

Area B East: Work in newly opened Square B9 provided us with the definitive southern boundary of a Phase A complex of buildings found in Squares B1, B6, B7 and B8 primarily (Fig. 5). A clear gap or alleyway delineated this complex from the easternmost room. In fact, a blocked doorway in the east wall of the B9 house at one time had provided access to the alley leading into the pillared area to the north in B11. The one surface layer found in the B9 room was a patchy layer of plaster roof collapse. To the south of this building, a heavy layer of roof collapse/tumble was found. Complicating the excavation of the interior space of the building was the discovery of a complete skeleton found lying in a cist tomb, as well as two other modern burials in a small built tomb near the western balk.

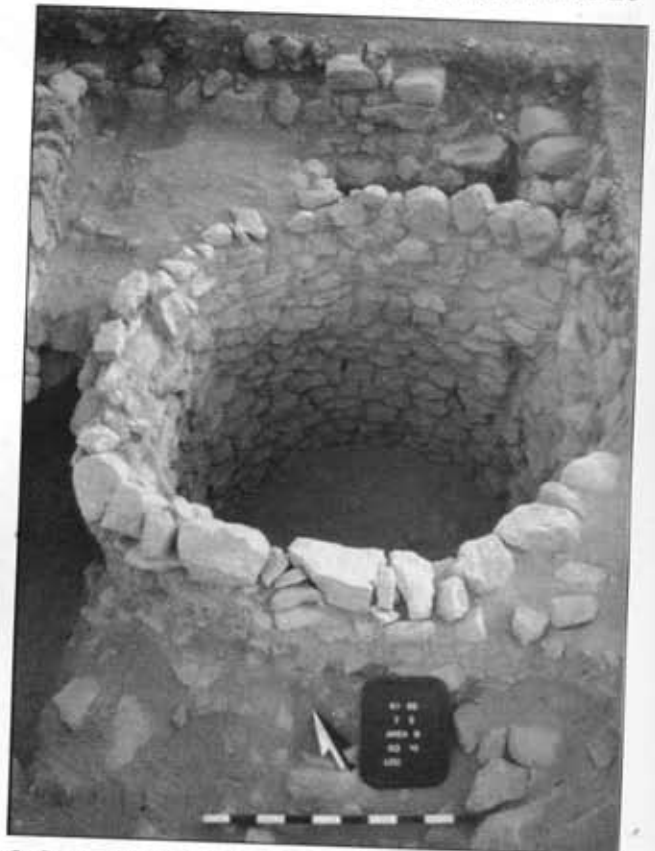
To the east, in B10-15, an extremely well built and well-preserved broad-room house came to light. It was a two-room house, the partition wall being a Phase A1 blockage of an earlier row of pillars. There was an entrance giving access to the courtyard and rooms to the north. Two pillars framed the entrance: a reused pillar-orthostat on the west and a massive pillar drum on the east. There was a bench along the north wall, which continued eastward into Square B15, where it cornered northward into Square B13. Pointing to functional differences, a pavement covered the floor of the western room of the building, while in the east, a very thick plaster surface partially covered a layer of poorly preserved cobblestones, possibly evidence of an earlier floor. The absence of wall lines to the south of the B9, B10 and B15 houses, but presence of a rubble/pebble hard-packed outer surface, suggests a street or courtyard.

Of great interest is the enigmatic circular installation (15011) found in the courtyard to the

east of the B10/15 broad-room house (Fig. 8). This unusual structure, which is close to 3.0m in diameter, is composed of small to medium cobblestones in a one-row wall. At 2.75m in depth, the bottom had remained elusive by end of season. This subterranean circular structure lies just below the original topsoil and rubble, as is usual for Phase A1 structures. Within the bin, excavation found a haphazard arrangement of boulders at one end, smaller cobbles at the other, and soil throughout. A section through the bin showed no evidence of strata or tip marks. Bones, lithics, few pieces of badly weathered pottery, and some modern items were found, although the bottom had not been reached by end of season. Whether this installation is EB IV or is a later intrusion could not be determined this season.

Phase B

Area B West: To date, the architectural plan for the Phase B settlement in B West is not yet apparent, although the various wall fragments all witness to a series of rectangular buildings in the area. The Phase B remains at the western end can be summarized briefly, given the few squares in which such levels were reached. Two structures in B6-B5



8. Subterranean, circular bin found in Area B, Sq. 15 east of EB IV Phase A structure, from the south (photo: S. Rempel).

were found, one facing east, the other west, where it may link up with Phase B walls found further to the west in B5 and B5A. One of the most significant Phase B finds of the season was a ceramic bull's head discovered on a plaster surface that ran up to a Phase B wall. A pounding stone and a sunken mortar were in association with the bull's head.

Area B East: Several additional elements of the Phase B "public complex" came to light this season. Earlier we discussed the Phase A two-room house with pillared entrance in Square B10. Excavation of the plaster surface in the eastern room uncovered the continuation and apparent corner of the eastern wall of the "corridor room" found to the north in Square B11. A series of compaction layers — surfaces and build up — was found in association. It appears that the Phase B wall was founded on top of the mud-brick layer, which, as mentioned before, represents the leveled surface of the Phase C destruction. To the west of the corridor room, in B7, additional evidence for another room to the complex was evident. Upon removal of several Phase A pillar bases and a wall, it was clear that the Phase B white plaster surface clearly sealed against the southern boundary wall of the "public complex" building.

Of particular importance was the discovery of the eastern boundary wall of the "public complex". In 1997, as mentioned earlier, we had traced the southern boundary wall eastward into Square B13, although the configuration of the room to the north was not apparent. This season we traced the wall to the east balk in B13, where it became clear that it cornered and continued northward through B14 (Fig. 6). What is particularly significant is that this north-south wall (14018-14025) runs over the inner fortification line and abuts the large boulders that were a part of the combined rubble/outer fortification line. Despite a modern robber pit, it nevertheless seems quite clear that this wall is the eastern boundary wall of a third contiguous room of the "Public Complex". Interestingly, south of the balk, this same wall also looks to be a Phase B reuse of a much deeper Phase C wall (13030), a phenomenon already noted in 1997 concerning the continuation of the southern boundary wall of the "public complex". Wall 14018-14025 provides confirmation of data found in B8, B12, and B14 indicating that the "public complex" utilized the outer fortifications as its back (north) wall.

Phase C

Area B East: Given the discussion immediately above, it would be useful to discuss the remains in

Area B East first. In Square B14, below the Phase B plaster collapse/surface level, the expected ash and mud-brick layer from Phase C appeared. Ash/mud brick does not seal either fortification wall, but is instead only found along the southern side of the inner fortification. More information about the date and construction of the fortifications materialized in a 1.5m wide section running 7 meters in length along the western edge of Square B14 southward into B13. The section through the fortifications in this area exposed a clear northern face of the inner fortification wall and a clear northern face of the outer fortification wall, but failed to find a clear southern face of the outer fortification wall. This may suggest, as we have proposed in the past, that a) the inner fortification wall was at one time the northern-most wall at the site, and b) the outer fortification and intermediate rubble fill were constructed later (and simultaneously).

In an attempt to understand the various elements of the fortifications in Square B14, several other factors need consideration. At the southwest, new W. 14032, running northward from the south balk, abutted the inner fortification wall. The Phase C mud brick/ash collapse seals against, but does not cover this wall. Interestingly, W. 14032 was abutted by an east-west running wall (W. 14031) in the south part of the square. Together with the inner fortification wall, these walls may form the sides of a tower. The large rubble found between these walls certainly may represent tumble from such a structure. If this inference proves to be true, it would confirm Nelson Glueck's identification of interim towers in the defensive line around the site. Also, it should be noted that the view of the wadi to the northeast would have made this an especially good location for a tower.

Finally, excavation below the level of the Phase B "public complex" southern boundary wall in Square B7 exposed the expected Phase C destruction layer. This destruction layer was sealed against bonded walls 7072 and 7074, which form the northern and western walls of a Phase C structure in the eastern sector of the square. The west wall ran south for two meters until it mysteriously ended (neatly constructed courses gave way to disordered rubble). Additional work brought to light a surface below the mud brick collapse associated with this structure.

Area B West: Excavation uncovered Phase C levels in Squares B1, B5, and B2A. Work resumed in B1 in the hopes of exposing the eastern extent of the structure discovered in 1997 in Square B2, the structure found to be associated with the tower. The

findings in B1 were similar in that a two-phased wall (1060/1072) was found to abut the tower platform (Fig. 3). In contrast to the C1 surface in B2, however, in B1 the surface included a wonderful array of smashed pottery, sealed by destruction debris. Topped mud bricks, ash, stone, and much mud-brick debris made up the destruction layer. Besides pottery and several objects, the team discovered part of a wooden beam and a great quantity of botanical remains, primarily lentil. The several vessels restored from the destruction layer were a red-slipped and burnished jug and a pithos with flared rim and rope molding. Since parallels for both types of vessels exist in both EB II and EB III, we continued to date Phase C to the EB II-III period.

Moving to Square B5, south of B2, the objective was to investigate several wall lines discernible at the west end below a mass of mud bricks and mud-brick debris. Excavation uncovered a Phase C structure running from the north balk to where it cornered and turned westward. Confirming the phasing of this structure, W. 5014 ran under a Phase B wall (5005) jutting out from the west balk; it also lay below and within the same mud-brick collapse found in Squares B2/B1. Large bricks of bright reddish-orange color were found atop part of the wall and east of the wall, suggesting the direction from which they slid. Inside the constricted area of the building, two surfaces were found. In the eastern sector of the square, the complex nature of the mud-brick remains plus time constraints prompted us to forego excavation this season.

Finally, we opened new square B2A with the primary objective to understand the nature of the western perimeter wall (2053). Recall that W. 2053 abuts the northwest tower, from which point it runs southwestward toward Area A and beyond. A section against W. 2053 on the west revealed three elements to the perimeter wall: a 1.25m high wall of fairly well-laid courses of stone on the interior, a terrace or retaining wall (2A005) of only 2-3 courses at the base, and rubble in-between. The entire width of the fortification was ca. 2.50m. That section illuminated for the first time a very different construction method to the defenses at the site. On the north, the fortifications are monumental, solid, and deep. That section of the western perimeter defenses likewise revealed the remains of an earlier stratum. The innermost segment of the western perimeter wall (W. 2053) had been erected upon an earlier, destroyed wall (2A025). The latter looked to be a substantial stone foundation, on top of which were several rows of intact mud bricks.

From the further discovery that W. 2A025 included a battered buttress or pier (W. 2A027) standing ca. 1.0m high with a width of 0.60m, we surmised that we had discovered an earlier fortification line and tentatively termed it Phase D (Fig. 9). Within the matrix of W. 2053, EB IV pottery was found. This evidence combines with other data that have suggested for some time that the EB IV peoples rebuilt and clearly reused the earlier defensive line.

The 2004 Season

Given the relatively short season and small staff this year, the project's goals were limited, but focused. No new squares were opened; rather, the aim was primarily to maximize horizontal exposure of Phase C levels throughout previously excavated squares in Area B West/East. There were three precise goals: 1) to connect, by means of limited excavation and stratigraphic removal of key balks, the Phase C settlement within the fortifications, and to definitively date this level to either EB II or EB III; 2) to investigate and date the new wall remains from Phase D discovered at the end of 2000, and 3) to answer some unresolved questions from previous seasons, through minor probes and/or limited excavation, e.g., a) What was the depth and the purpose of enigmatic circular stone structure in B15? b) What lay below the apparent EB III/IV transitional Phase I in the Area C Gateway? c) What was the nature of the stone installation on the summit of the hill immediately behind the site of Khirbat Iskandar? For ease of discussion, it is preferable here to summarize first the Phase C levels, which constitute the majority of the work this season.

Phase C

Squares B1-B7; B1/B7 balk; B2/B1 balk: Squares



9. The Phase D structures discovered below the western perimeter wall, from the west (photo: E. Skinner).

B2-B1-B7 run contiguously east-west just south of the tower and fortifications that run along the northern perimeter of the site (Fig. 2). By end of the 2004 season, removal of the B1-B2 and B1-B7 north-south running balks had connected Phase C levels in all three squares. Excavation of the Phase C occupation served to further clarify the northern defensive system as well. Thanks to clear diagnostic types in the corpus of pottery recovered this season in the B1 destruction debris — numerous vessels with wavy ledge-handles — it is clear that this upper (Phase C1) level dates to the EB III period. A welcome reaffirmation of this date occurred in Square B5, just south of B2, where the same destruction level revealed equally clear, diagnostic EB III pottery (see below). Once processed, the newly recovered C14 samples from the destruction layer should provide a more precise date for the end of EB III at Khirbat Iskandar.

Starting with Square B7, work focused on bringing the western sector down to Phase C levels, in particular, to link up with the destruction level found in Square B1 to the west. The crumbly nature of the B7/B1 balk, composed of mud-brick detritus and sintered chert from a destroyed wall at the north end, made excavation difficult. Nevertheless, the removal of destruction debris eventually brought down the square to the same surface upon which lay smashed pottery, as found on a Phase C1 surface in B1, as reported from the 2000 season. In the process, it greatly enhanced our understanding of Phase C and, significantly, its relation to the tower platform (below).

Careful delineation of the badly sintered wall at the north showed it to be the cause of the mass of destruction debris found in Phase C in B7 and B1 (Fig. 10). This wall had been built on top of Platform 1061. The final destruction of Phase C had caused it and its mud-brick superstructure to tumble southward, where it was found encasing restorable vessels right above the Phase C1 plastered surface/pavement. At the east end of the structure, in B7, a small area of pavement was found, in association with which was a reused “crown” of a pithos, that is, a complete neck, rim and shoulder, probably functioning as a stand of some sort, a similar stand was found in B5 (below). The pavement area included other items in association, a small juglet located opposite the stand at the west end, as well as a mortar at the southern edge. The destruction debris overriding and encompassing the above materials included four fairly well preserved wooden roofing beams. The plotted disposition of the beams, which were preserved for dendrochronological analysis, should provide important



10. East balk of Sq. B1 showing Phase C destruction debris (photo: R. Miceli).

information on EB III building techniques at the site.

Removal of the balk — a mass of destruction debris including a toppled quern of great size between B7 and B1 — offered yet more important data from smashed and restorable pottery. Whereas the vessels discovered in B7 were empty, several vessels in B1 were filled with grains, both wheat and barley; in 2000 several jars in the same context contained quantities of lentils. Within the ashy layer 1021A above the surface, we recovered several human (probably male) articulated arm bones (complete ulna, mostly complete radius, distal humerus, six out of eight carpals, four metacarpals, and 11 phalanges), which reassembled into a fairly complete arm.

Finally, west of the pavement, but more centrally located, a pillar base (diameter of 0.65m) marked the central support for the roof; in close proximity there were two clear postholes, one of which included remains of wood retrieved for a sample. Immediately east of and adjacent to wall 1072 was a door pivot/mortar. Plaster Surface 7082 was traceable westward across Square B1 and the B1/B2 balk into B2, where it linked clearly with the surface previously uncovered there in association with W. 2095 and its doorway. It remains for a later season to investigate and link up earlier Phase C2 across the area.

The architectural plan of the Phase C settlement was still not entirely clear by end of season, given the lack of exposure to the south. What is clear is that every Phase C1 wall showed signs of rebuilding and reuse. Only one east-west wall, found in the B2 south balk, against which W. 2095 abuts, gave a clue as to the southern boundary of the building(s) just inside the fortifications. The remains of a stone and mud-brick wall (1065) that

fell southward onto the Phase C1 surface suggests the upper reaches of a structure erected on top of the platform, possibly the back (north) wall of the B1-B2-B7 structures. Tracing the extent of these architectural units to the south and to the east is the goal of future excavation.

Fieldwork this season has contributed overall to our understanding of the fortifications. In particular, the clearance of the debris and destroyed wall at the north end of B7, along with excavation of the B1/B7 balk, effectively removed the barrier obscuring our view of the easternmost section of platform 1061. The platform, as we now see it, is ca. 10m long (including steps at the western end which bond to tower 2077), runs east west across the northern edges of B1-B7. It appears to be ca. 2m wide, although there is no clearly defined northern edge, where it intersects with the inner fortification line. The presence of a line of rubble on top of the platform (possibly related to the destroyed sintered wall in B1-B7) still obstructs our view at this point. The platform wall ends at north-south transverse W. 8058, which appears to be evidence that the fortifications were constructed in segments, similar to a phenomenon found at Bāb adh-Dhrā' and other Early Bronze Age sites (Rast and Schaub 2003: 280-83).

The platform, steps, the outer walls of the corner bastion on the south and west and the northern perimeter wall all bond together, thus strongly pointing to their contemporaneity in terms of construction. All evidence from stratified occupation within the fortifications indicates that it was the Phase C2 people who erected the platform, tower, and outer wall. Based on the EB III pottery on surfaces associated with the reuse of these structures in Phase C1, it is likely that Phase C2 also dates to the EB III period, a date to be verified hopefully in our next season.

Square B5: The resumption of work in Square B5 centered on carefully delineating the mud bricks from debris in the eastern sector, in the hopes of discerning clean lines of mud-brick walls. The objective was also to clarify the relation of the mud brick tumble to the well-preserved Phase C structure (W. 5014-5015) exposed in the western part of the square in 2000.

Once excavation of the mud-brick debris began, the continuation of east west W. 5015 as W. 5037 illuminated an eastern room as well. It soon became evident that, as in B1-B7, the collapse had preserved a wealth of materials from the EB III period within this eastern room. Within a fairly confined area inside the room, excavation uncovered

an unusual mud-brick wall/platform/installation (along the east balk); mud-brick, beams, plaster roof collapse with reed impressions, and great quantities of seeds preserved in the ash (along the north balk); and, a treasure trove of objects and restorable pottery, including in particular a complete EB III teapot with wavy handles (Fig. 11). The teapot was discovered in a locus of mud-brick collapse, whether roof or wall fall is uncertain. Along with the wavy ledge-handled teapot, the skeleton of a sheep/goat was found entwined around this vessel.

Many of the objects found were also within the mud-brick debris, sitting at skewed angles, some above the level of the charred beams. This suggests the presence of a second story or perhaps shelf from which they fell or the roof upon which they sat. Along with the charred roof beams, there were many specifically definable roof pieces made of plaster and containing reed impressions that should offer important information concerning construction techniques during that time period.

The Phase C1 destruction level contained many intact mud bricks. Most of these were lying at odd angles in the debris, but were carefully defined in excavation in order to indicate direction of fall, which seems to be from north to south. The mud-brick installation seemed to consist of four intersecting short stubs of intact mud bricks, with a large stone set into the base in the northwest quadrant (Fig. 12). Two sections were apparent, the clearer one (on the north) contained a large flat paver within a type of niche made up of stones and mud brick. Within this niche, on the paving stone, there sat a restorable vessel with two loop handles.

The numerous finds in the room included a wealth of ground-stone objects, many of which seemed to be mortars or grinding implements of



11. EB III teapot found in destruction debris of Sq. B5 (photo: R. Miceli).



12. Area B, Square B5, looking east at Phase C remains (photo: R. Miceli).

some sort, with the ground-out depressions being of various sizes and types, from shallow to deep. A number of these objects had depressions on both sides. The ground stone implements could suggest an area of specialized activities. It was possible to fill multiple large-sized bags with peas and lentils recovered along the NE section of the balk. A "crown"-like stand was found close to what appeared to be the bottom of a tournette. Interestingly the diameters of both were the same, suggesting that perhaps the tournette had originally been set on the stand.

A number of higher status items indicated that this room might not be purely domestic. For example, among the many objects found in the destruction debris, the following seemed to be somewhat special: 1) a complete limestone piriform-shaped macehead; 2) a stamp seal with a rectangular base showing no design however; 3) an extremely heavy hematite stone in the form of (perhaps) a cosmetic grinder, 4) a very heavy, wide "wheel-like" object with partial depressions on either side.

What is clear, however, is that these materials were part of the upper, Phase C1, level, the level whose destruction layer is equivalent to that in B2-B1-B7, thus dating it to the end of the EB III period at Khirbat Iskandar. As elsewhere, the B5 structures show secondary reuse. In the confined space of the western room, an earlier surface/stone pavement was found near the founding course of the building. The pottery remains to be studied, although as noted earlier, we believe that Phases C1 and C2 are both EB III.

Square B6: A probe along the north balk in Square B6 sought to glimpse Phase C connections with B5 to the west and B2 to the north in anticipation of continued exposure of this stratum in future sea-

sons. Below the expected EB III destruction debris evidence for a surface and possible pavement/wall appeared at end of season.

Squares B2A/B5A: Although we had hoped to expose more of the Phase D structures this season, time constraints only permitted the dismantling of a segment of the western perimeter wall (2053/2A023) and only partial removal of the south balk of B2A. Somewhat surprisingly, it became apparent that the Phase D wall (2A027) curved at that point and proved to be a continuation of the curvilinear wall (2108) exposed in 1997. The latter appeared to run under the Phase C wall with doorway (2095). It remains for a future season to achieve enough exposure of the Phase D architecture before we can say anything about its function, as well as its date.

Finally, further work in Square B5a, just south of B2a, enhanced our understanding of western perimeter W. 2053/2A023/5A023 and its relationship to the internal phasing of the site. In 2000 we had discovered a ceramic bull's head on a surface connected with a Phase B wall (above). As elsewhere, the wall had been set on the leveled surface of the Phase C destruction debris. Excavation showed, as expected, that the Phase C1 mud brick destruction debris had fallen against the western perimeter wall (as seen in B2). At the south end of this partial square, work discovered an east-west wall abutting the western perimeter wall. The east-west wall appears to continue the southern boundary line of the structure found in B5 to the east. Moreover, the wall had been rebuilt in its upper courses (possibly Phase B). Contiguous to it on the south is the southern wall of a Phase A structure that likewise proved to abut the western perimeter defenses. There have in the past been other indications that Phase A may be linked to what remained of the defenses at that time.

Thus, in summary, on the basis of our excavations at the west end, particularly in Square B2, where the stratigraphic profile is the clearest, there are four major settlements superimposed in Area B (thus far). From the top, Phases A and B date to the EB IV period. Below is the Phase C1 destroyed settlement, which is clearly EB III; it represents a reuse and rebuilding of Phase C2 structures, not excavated to any extent yet but probably EB III as well. The fortifications tie in with the Phase C1-2 structures; however, there are clear building phases to the construction history of the inner and outer walls. Below the Phase C structure (and western perimeter wall) in Square B2/B2A is the destroyed Phase D settlement, consisting primarily of the re-

cently discovered curvilinear structure plus pier, whose date and function is as yet indeterminable. It is not yet known how these discoveries south of the tower relate to the phasing discovered in 1987 in a probe north of the tower.

Phases A-B

Briefly, there were some interesting EB IV discoveries found while excavating the balks. They include Square B5, the B1/B2 balk, and the south balk of B2A. Trimming of the east balk of Square B5 prior to excavating the mud brick Phase C stratum in the east found remnants of the well-defined Phase B plaster surface and exposed a complete EB IV store-jar in association with this plaster surface. The store jar, which we retrieved, clearly intruded some distance through the plaster surface into the mud brick, suggesting it had originally functioned as a subterranean storage vessel.

In the intersecting balks of Square B2 west/B2A south, we found evidence to add to our Phase A and Phase B architectural plans, a blocked doorway with door pivot nearby for the former, and a large mortar below for the latter. The Phase B mortar lay embedded in a plaster surface over which lay the expected level of roof collapse that characterizes Phase B throughout Area B. Within the roof collapse matrix, there were two simple cups along with a very clear votive cup base fragment. A tracing of the plaster surface westward led to an installation (?) near (not set against) the western perimeter wall. It included a row of four, possibly five, mostly flattened stones set on edge. One of these small stones was a reused tournette base, with depressions on both sides. These discoveries await further study within the larger architectural context prior to speculating about their purpose. Finally, removal of the B1/B2 balk afforded us with more stratigraphic linkages between the two squares. These included segments of Phase A and Phase B walls. Of interest here was the discovery of a pit dug, apparently, from the Phase B plaster surface. On the north edge of the pit, and separated by a mud-brick border, a second, ashy pit was clearly in association. These features intruded into the Phase C destruction layer and bottomed out at a level of cobbles/pavers, which were coeval with, and apparently a component of, the Phase C1/ threshold surface in B2.

Other Work

a) The Phase A Circular Structure in B15: We were able to continue the excavation of the circular structure, finding the paved bottom surface within 10-15cm of the level reached at the end of the 2000

season. There were a few sherds found on the surface. In order to confirm this level as the original surface of the installation, excavation continued below the pavement to what appeared to be a hard-packed soil surface below, evidently the surface up to which the installation had been cut. The few sherds found below the pavement, as well as the few above, will hopefully offer clues as to the date and the occupation level into which this installation intrudes. As to function, further observation of its construction clearly revealed that there was only one construction phase and that plaster lined the upper third segment. This apparent effort to dissuade rodents from entering the structure suggests that it is a bin/granary of some sort. With further study we hope to determine whether it is EB IV or a later intrusion.

b) Probe in Area C: the EB IV Gateway area: The probe in Square C8 was successful in that it expanded our knowledge about the Phase 1 settlement in Area C by augmenting the somewhat limited ceramic corpus previously obtained and providing additional architectural evidence for this phase. Work in C8 began by probing into the Phase 2 surface, where work ended in 1987. Below a well-compacted silt layer (possibly mud brick detritus), the new wall (8018) appeared. It was about 1.0m in length and two rows wide (ca. 0.63m). It clearly extended further into C8 proper beyond the probe area. In association with this wall, below a series of fill layers, the team came down onto a stone-paved surface 8022 that sealed against wall 8018, whose associated pottery was read as EB IV/EB III. The season ended before pre-Phase 1 phasing could be probed. Finally, due to erosion of the east balk, the eastern boundary wall of the C8 room became visible, was recorded and mapped.

c) "Circle of Stone" Structure: Both aerial photographs and survey in 1987 on the hilltop behind the site indicated that a possible cultic feature — one of Nelson Glueck's "circle of stone" installations — was in place on the summit (approximately at a height of 100m) overlooking the site. A one-week investigation, plotting, drawing, and partial excavation of the feature illuminated it as a probable two-ring "circle of stone". Two massive menhirs had fallen in the middle. When standing, the menhirs would have been visible from afar. In the uppermost, unstratified soil layers, some Roman sherds were found. Below this, a level seemingly in use with the standing menhirs unfortunately yielded no ceramic remains. Given the site's occupational history and a comparison with similar features, it seems reasonable to infer that the feature was in use sometime during the Early Bronze Age.

Conclusion

The 1997, 2000, and 2004 seasons of excavation of Khirbat Iskandar have exposed more of the important EB IV settlements in Phases A-B. These three seasons, likewise, have uncovered what appears to be an equally important settlement from the EB III Period (Phase C), including a destruction layer that brought that period to an end. Yet an earlier settlement (Phase D) has come to light on the western perimeter of the site, in the form of a curved stone and mud brick wall, including a stone abutment or pier. However, there are not sufficient ceramic remains to date this phase, although a combination of factors suggests a date earlier than EB III, whether EB II or EB I, is not known. From previous excavation of probes north of the tower in Square B4, from Parr's work, and from the cemetery remains, we suspect that there is an EB I settlement on the mound. These and other questions will have to await further excavation while we concentrate on understanding the EB III/EB IV transition at the site.

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